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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000503

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR SHAPIRO/PASCUAL;
JOINT STAFF FOR LTG SELVA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: POSSIBLE 65-UNIT EXPANSION OF NABLUS-AREA
SETTLEMENT UNDERWAY

REF: A. 08 JERUSALEM 1429
[B](#). 08 JERUSALEM 1368
[C](#). 08 JERUSALEM 1165

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The mayor of Burin, a Palestinian village near Nablus adjacent to the Har Bracha settlement, says he believes ongoing land clearing operations begun three weeks ago are part of a plan for 65 new housing units in Bracha. The mayor said Palestinian laborers working in the village report the addition of floors and rooms to existing housing units. Poloff observed a bulldozer at work on a ridgeline above Burin on March 18. On March 20, driving past Har Bracha, Poloffs saw two bulldozers working on an area of freshly turned dirt approximately four football fields in size. End summary.

Palestinians Report Possible Settlement Expansion

[1](#)2. (C) Burin mayor Ali Eid told Poloff on March 18 that bulldozers had begun work three weeks earlier on a ridgeline above Burin. Eid said he is unsure if the bulldozers are clearing land for agricultural use or for settlement expansion. He provided Poloff with copies of Ottoman-era documents purporting to document Palestinian ownership of the parcels being cleared. Eid said the GOI declared 1200 dunums (300 acres) in the area to be state land in 1987. Residents appealed the order at the time, but Eid had no further information on the status of that appeal. Since the beginning of the second intifada, Eid said, villagers have been unable to access lands close to Har Bracha, including the lands that are currently being cleared. According to Eid, an attorney for the village submitted a pre-judicial intervention with a GOI attorney on March 16 seeking to stop the ridgeline land clearing activities.

[1](#)3. (C) Eid said Palestinian laborers working in Har Bracha told him there are plans for 65 to 70 new units to be built in the near future. Eid also believes a tender for the units was recently published in a Hebrew-language newspaper, but could not provide Poloff with a copy of the tender announcement. Eid speculated that the land clearing is being done in preparation for new construction, and said that two weeks earlier he began hearing reports from laborers of additional rooms and floors being constructed on existing units in Har Bracha (Note: Settlers in Har Bracha are among the most radical in West Bank settlements. Reftels reported on widely publicized incidents during the summer of 2008 where settlers allegedly launched makeshift "rockets" towards Burin and, in one case, threw a Molotov cocktail into a baby's crib in a house on the outskirts of Burin. Settler leadership in the area denied responsibility for the

incidents. End note.)

Poloffs Observe Ongoing Land Clearing

14. (C) Poloffs observed two bulldozers at work on March 20 in an area four football fields in size on the ridgeline between Har Bracha and its southern outposts. Poloffs did not enter the settlement and were unable to verify the ongoing construction of additional floors or rooms on existing units. Other than two bulldozers and several private vehicles, Poloffs did not observe the presence of other construction equipment or materials and could not determine if the land was being cleared for agricultural use or in preparation for residential construction. (Note: Photos of the cleared area are available on the Consulate General's classified website under the "Political Reporting Attachments" link at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/jerusalem/ind ex.cfm>. End note.)

Peace Now: Nothing Unusual About Expansion

15. (C) Hagit Ofran, of the Israeli NGO Peace Now, which tracks settlement activities in the West Bank, told Poloff on March 20 that she is unaware of any specific projects in Har Bracha, but commented that an expansion of the size described by Eid is consistent with ongoing settlement expansion in the West Bank. She said Peace Now believes Har Bracha was built illegally under Israeli law, but a town plan was approved by Israeli authorities within the last 12 months that might form

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the legal basis for new construction.

WALLES